

Why Teachers Teach

A Case Study of Teachers at a Suburban Elementary School in North Carolina

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Masters Thesis at the Faculty of social sciences

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

June 30th 2014

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Trykk: Alkopi Parkveien, Oslo

Summary

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Introduction:

In light of a series of wage freezes over the past 6 years and negative changes to the teaching profession, alongside a major overhaul to their curriculum, the teachers of North Carolina are understandably distraught, indicated by protests and increased job turnover in the state. I pose the question of why some teachers choose to stay in spite of these changes and issues they face.

In order to solve this problem I traveled to a school in North Carolina which I will call Hilltop Elementary, this being a generic false name of course. There I interviewed 12 teachers on their likes and dislikes about teaching, how they feel about the government's policy decisions as well as why they continue teaching. I also volunteered at the school during and after work hours while I was there.

Theoretic framework:

In order to answer my question I have to both interpret the nature of the stresses they face, along with their reasoning for staying, and what they perceive as the "bottom line" before they would leave.

I attempt to understand their stresses in light of Workplace Alienation theory, which has its roots in Marxist theory, but updated by, among others: Aiken and Hage (1966), Blauner (1964) and Cox and Wood (1980). Alienation theories pose that the separation of the worker and the results of his labour, leads to a feeling of meaninglessness. Further I view my findings in light of Policy Alienation as proposed by Tummers, Bekkers and Steijn (2009). Who have adapted alienation theory to understanding alienation expressed by of policy decisions on public sector professions. Furthermore I attempt to understand teachers motivations for continuing to teach in light of meaningful work theory as presented by Chalofsky (2003). Meaningful work theory is the polar opposite of traditional alienation

theory, in that it describes a work place that is meaningful to the worker.

Method:

This is a qualitative study using primarily data from structured interviews. The interviews are between 15 and 30 minutes in length, and were transcribed in their entirety. Alongside the interviews I also was at the school the entire work day for the week I was present for interviews, and volunteered in several classes. As well as holding a presentation on Norway while I was there. This was invaluable in providing a context in which I could understand and interpret the interviews.

Analysis:

I analyzed the data for this interview using a variant of the deductive inductive method similar to SDI as it's represented by (Tjora 2012). Using my findings in the raw data to find new theories with which to analyze the data.

Findings:

The teachers are primarily alienated by the policies put in place by the government, but find their work place to be meaningful. Many teachers seem to want to stay because they enjoy “teaching” even though the policy aspect is frustrating them. Others seem to stay because they are too invested to leave. Particularly the more experienced teachers seem content to wait until retirement.

A special thanks to all of the teachers who agreed to be interviewed for this project. Without you this would not have been possible. A further thanks to my contact in the USA who helped me get my feet on the ground in the states.

And another thanks to my family for supporting me. I know you are reading this.

Sincerely

Justin H. Ebert

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1. Introduction

In the 6 years between 2007 and 2013 teachers in North Carolina, like many other states in the United States have had to contend with shrinking budgets and cuts to teacher privileges. In 2013 in particular the state of North Carolina passed a budget that would see teacher's wages frozen for the 5th time in 6 years. In addition to this, legislation followed that would essentially end teacher tenure as well as eliminating benefits for teachers holding a masters degree or higher education. As of 2010 the common core, an attempt to create federal standards for education in English and mathematics, has been adopted in several states, including the state of North Carolina. This has brought with it a complete overhaul of much of the current curriculum in the state as well as an increased work load in the form of more regular assessments and feedback on student progress. In order to ensure its implementation and with the goal of creating an education system that can compete globally, the state government has also made teachers more accountable for the results of their students along with increased oversight. Regulating teacher tenure to only the top performing teachers is also a part of this project. These changes have caused a considerable amount of stress and dissatisfaction amongst teachers, prompting many to leave the state or the profession in general.

However many teachers continue to teach on despite these changes, and the profession is still thriving. At one school in North Carolina which I will call Hilltop Elementary for the sake of maintaining their anonymity, I interviewed 12 teachers who had worked at the school for at least the past 3 years while these changes were coming into play. I interviewed the teachers on what they like and dislike about being a teacher, and their feelings towards the state governments decisions over the past 6 years. As well as questioning them about what makes it worthwhile for them and whether or not they are considering changing careers. My goal in this thesis was to find out 1) Are the teachers at Hilltop elementary feeling alienated by the policies the state government has implemented and 2) What about being a teacher motivates them to continue working in spite of the unique challenges posed to them by the policy changes over the past 6 years. In this thesis I will also discuss the potential long term issues that policy alienation could have for the teacher's motivations to teach.

In the Following paper I will first present in detail the situation for teachers in North Carolina,

including information on the economic crisis, the policy changes, and the implementation of the common core. After that I will discuss some previous literature on teachers, and alienation. The next section of this thesis will be devoted to the theoretical approach and methodological approach I used in this thesis. The bulk of this thesis will however be spent detailing my findings in light of my theoretical approach. To close things off I will open a discussion of the potential consequences of policy alienation on the motivations of teachers to continue teaching, including the danger of losing good teachers at an unsustainable rate. Finally I will close off this thesis with a brief summary and conclusion.

2. Background

The Economic Crisis of 2007-2008

The economic crisis of 2008 came as no real surprise with US debt on the rise. However the shock came more from the speed at which it all happened. According to David M. Kotz it started sometime in the summer of 2008 (though it has roots much further back in time) (Kotz 2009: 305). It began with the mortgage crisis and leading on to the eventual bank bailout alongside the already rising national debt. Unemployment rose rapidly from spring 2008 before peaking at nearly double the average rate for the previous 6 years at 10.0 in October 2009. It then slowly began to fall again. (Bureau of Labor Statistics, read June 2014) With Rising unemployment and an increasing number of displaced families the 2008 economic crisis has been viewed by some as the worst financial event in the US since the great depression in the 1930's (The Guardian 2008, Reuters 2008, CNN 2009).

Wage freezes and benefit cuts to teachers in North Carolina

As of July 2013 the State government passed a budget that would freeze teachers wages for the 5th time since 2007, roughly coinciding with the economic crisis. While their wages are already 10 000 dollars a year below the national average wage for (public school) teachers, another wage freeze was passed along with the state budget in 2013. Also further legislation was added that would result in an end to teacher tenure and cuts to benefits for teachers holding a masters degree (huffingtonpost.com 2013). Some of the teachers I interviewed for this thesis had been “grandfathered” in because they already received these benefits prior to the wage freezes and before the law comes into effect, indicating that the cuts to masters benefits only impacts teachers who do not already have a masters degree, thus younger teachers are the ones most prominently effected. The cut to teacher tenure is also of particular significance because North Carolina is a right to work state. Right to work legislation limits collective bargaining (Unions), or undermines it entirely. It does not, as the name implies, guarantee work for those seeking it. In fact it could do the opposite, by allowing employers to exclude employees who are members of a union (Braid 1998). In short North Carolina lacks union protection for many workers, including but not limited to teachers. Tenure for teachers had previously provided teachers who had 5 or more years of experience with a moderate form of job security, as they were entitled to due process (a court case) before dismissal. However when these reforms come into effect only the top 25% highest performing teachers

will be given tenure positions (pewstates.org 2013).

New curriculum, more testing and more accountability

Money and job security are not the only challenges the teachers of North Carolina are faced with. Teachers have to cope with more testing and accountability as well as the adoption of the common core which has led to a total overhaul of their curriculum. The added stress of a changing work environment with no additional compensation seems to have had a rather noteworthy effect. In Forsyth county for instance they experienced an increase in teacher turnover by 5 percentage points bringing the total up to 14% over the past two years prior to 2013 (journalnow.com 2013). As unemployment rates have begun to fall again there have been increased numbers of teachers leaving the state in general, over 4000 with up to 3 years experience between 2010 and 2013 (Huffington post 2013). This indicates that there is noteworthy dissatisfaction amongst teachers in North Carolina.

The common core

Prior to the adaptation of the common core, the mandatory curriculum of public schools was typically decided upon by the individual states, and while some coherency is expected due to the existence of national tests like the widely used SAT's which are used by colleges and universities to screen applicants, the pacing, and when different subjects are taught is largely left up to the individual states to decide upon. The common core sets a standard for English language studies and Mathematics, providing specific details on what is to be taught at each grade level. However it does not prescribe how these subjects are to be taught (Hwang et. all 2011) The common core claims to provide a number of benefits on it's implementation.

1. Shared expectations. Some argue that math is math and reading is reading. Why, then, should we have different expectations for students who live in Ohio than for students who live in Mississippi? A national curriculum would offer consistency.

2. Focus. Standards-based reform was intended to bring more focus to the U.S. curriculum, as in the curricula in high achieving countries around the world. The Common Core standards may represent greater focus than state standards typically do; that is the explicit intention of the math standards.

3. Efficiency. Under a national curriculum, it would not be necessary for each state to develop its own content standards, assessments, and curriculum guides. Even if two multistate consortia are building assessments, two assessments are more efficient than 50. Moreover, the efficiency produced by a national curriculum could extend to other sectors of the education business, for example, development of curriculum materials, professional development for educators, and preservice teacher education.

4. Quality of assessments. With the set of Common Core standards and one or two aligned assessments, it might be possible to (a) deliver assessments electronically and (b) make them computer adaptive. Electronically delivered assessments could be more animated and engaging; computeradaptive testing would produce fewer floor and ceiling effects.

(Hwang et. All 2011: 103-104)

However The common core presents a substantial shift from previous standards set by the different states. (Hwang et. All 2011: 114) Implying that it's implementation requires an overhaul of the schools curriculum, as we noted in the the introduction to this thesis.

3. Previous research in the field

A considerable amount of research has been conducted in the field of psychology, with regards to the stress experienced by teachers and why they are dissatisfied with their jobs. “Burnout” a popular but diffuse psychological term is one of the hotter topics that seems to reoccur in research of teachers. Mary Beth G. Anderson and Edward F. Iwanicki (1984) wrote an article for *Education Administration Quarterly* on the relationship between Teacher motivation and burnout. They found a correlation between a lack of self-actualization and esteem to increased levels of burnout at work. Anthony Gary Dworkin (1987) wrote a book called “Teacher burnout in public schools, the structural causes and consequences for children”. The book attempts to explain how alienation and burnout affect teacher turnover. However it was criticized by Michael Vavrus (1987) writing for the *Urban review*, for lacking among other things, the actual “structural” elements that the book teases us with. He also criticized Dworkin of confounding alienation and burnout together, which undermines the usefulness of alienation theory as a tool for understanding teachers predicament. (Vavrus 1987: 2) The distinct lack of a sociological study of teacher turnover and job dissatisfaction is interesting to note, as while psychology is most certainly useful for understanding behavior in high stress jobs. The conditions of the workplace and the value of the work itself is something worth studying from a sociological perspective as well. This is something my thesis strives to underline. Later in this thesis I will be using policy alienation theory and meaningful work theory in particular to attempt to understand the responses of the teachers interviewed for this thesis.

Harold Cox and James R. Wood (1980) wrote an article on organizational structure and its relationship to alienation of professionals. In this case they used public school teachers as a case for this particular topic. They theorize based on prior studies by among others Richard Scott (1959) that teachers should prefer autonomous workplaces rather than heteronomous workplaces. Further they suggest that professionals will reject or resist bureaucratic rules and supervision when they conflict with professional norms. A similar concept is echoed by Lars Tummors Victor Bekkers and Bram Steijn (2009) in their theory of policy alienation which I will discuss later in this thesis. Cox and Wood's hypothesis was:

Alienation among teachers will be greater: (1) the less frequently they participate in the decision-making process; (2) the more rigid, in their perception, the organizational hierarchy of authority; (3) the greater the

degree of job codification; and (4) the more rigidly rules are enforced. We also hypothesize that (5) teachers' belief in an administrator's willingness to consider teachers' views will vary inversely with that administrator's level within the hierarchy.

(Cox and wood 1980: 3)

They did find some support for their theory, and conclude that the basic problem that alienates teachers is that in bureaucratic organizations like public schools the professional's work is evaluated and controlled by administrators and supervisors that do not necessarily belong to the professionals peer group. (Cox and Wood 1980: 6) However this theory has a few gaps that I hope to fill. First off while teachers are controlled and evaluated by their administration, the administration its self is also at the lower end of a government hierarchy. In the United States, decisions on how teachers should teach and what they should teach are handed down from the state government. Policy decisions shape the schools. Secondly Cox and Wood are using a more traditional view of alienation. As I will demonstrate later in this thesis, the teachers I interviewed can enjoy their job and find it meaningful, they can even feel that their administration does listen to them and take part in local decision making, while still being alienated by policy decisions handed down to them by external decision makers. This situation is not typical in the traditional model for workplace alienation, which has its basis in the Private sector. Further more the workplace I found when I was interviewing teachers and helping out there in between interviews, was still fairly autonomous and diverse, with teachers participating in local decision making. However they were still alienated by decisions that they have no influence over, being handed down to them by faceless "higher ups".

4. Theoretical framework – Alienation versus meaningful work.

Alienation and meaningful work is a classic dichotomy. At the one end, alienation represents Karl Marx's dire vision of a work place devoid of meaning and intrinsic value, where the worker is abstracted from the fruits of his labor becoming only a tool. At the opposite end the theory of meaningful work provides a strikingly more positive, if only theoretical, look on the workplace, as a place where the work and the workplace itself can hold intrinsic value to the worker. It is telling however, that many of the articles and dissertations written about these topics on both ends bear a moralistic character.

“Alienation from work reflects a feeling of disappointment with career and professional development, as well as disappointment over the inability to fulfill professional norms”. (Aiken and Hage 1966: 497) Alienation originally stems from Marxist theory of the separation of workers from the means of production. The workers working and producing without ownership of the means of production and with increasingly less compensation would progressively feel that the work was meaningless and grow steadily more discontent. In professional workplaces however it seems to stem more from a lack of autonomy. Professionals like elementary school teachers are more likely to feel comfortable in autonomous workplaces as opposed to heteronomous workplaces. The main problem being that the majority of the professional work done by the teachers is subject to evaluation and control by higher ups in the authority chain, many of whom may lack the specialized education and professional norms of the teachers themselves (Cox and Wood 1980: 2-3). In other words they are being judged by an unfamiliar standard, and are forced to choose between their professional norms, and the expectations of their employers.

Policy alienation

Policy alienation as presented by Lars Tummers Victor Bekkers and Bram Steijn (2009), takes the framework presented by Blauner (1964) and adapts it for use in studying alienation in public sector jobs where professionals have a tendency to be alienated by policy changes that conflict with their professional norms. Blauner identified 3 stages of workplace alienation: Powerlessness, meaninglessness and social isolation.

Powerlessness is described by Blauner as the employee experiencing that they are being controlled by others or by an impersonal system and that they are unable to shape or effect their workplace in any meaningful way. Blauner describes 4 modes of powerlessness:

- 1) “the separation from ownership of the means of production and the resulting product.”*
- 2) “the inability to influence general managerial policies”*
- 3) “the lack of control over employment conditions”*
- 4) “the lack of control over the immediate work process.”*

(Blauner 1964: 16; Bekkers, Steijin and Tummers 2009: 688)

Bekkers, Tummers and Steijin Choose to look past the first mode, as they were interested in a subjective rather than objective understanding of alienation, and adopted Blauners second, third and fourth modes, adapting them to fit in the context of policies in the public sector. From that they created 3 modes of policy powerlessness, Strategic (Blauners second mode), Tactical (Blauners third mode) and Operational (Blauners fourth mode) (Bekkers, Steijin and Tummers 2009: 688-689).

1) The strategic level: If they (the professionals) have little influence on the strategic policy level, professionals will likely experience feelings of powerlessness. This can occur, for example, when a new policy is drafted without the help of the professionals who have to implement it.

2) The tactical level: This level refers to the professionals’ perceived influence on decisions concerning the way policy is implemented within their organization. This relates to how policy goals are transformed into specific performance requirements, which the organization has to meet, as well as to how resources (staff, budgets, etc.) are allocated among the organization’s units in order to meet these goals.

3) The operational level: Lacking significant control over the operational working process is another mode of powerlessness. In public administration literature, this is primarily described in terms of a civil servant’s discretion in implementing policies when interacting with clients.

(Bekkers, Steijin and Tummers 2009: 688-689).

Meaninglessness is the second dimension of alienation described by Blauner (1964). Blauner claims work is more meaningful if the work produced is unique, if the worker is involved with a larger portion of the product and if she or he is responsible for a significant portion of the product. Basically the more important the individual to the finished product, the more meaningful the product to the individual. Vice versa if the product is standardized, the contribution of the worker is small, and the worker only has responsibility for a small portion, then the work is less meaningful. (Blauner 1964: 23; Bekkers Steijin and Tummers 2009: 689) Bekkers, Steijin and Tummers also adapt Blauners definition of meaninglessness to the public sector in a similar manner to the previous dimension, at the strategic, tactical and operational level.

1) At the strategic level, meaninglessness refers to a professional's perception that a policy programme is not actually dealing with specific societal problems, or with the provision of desirable public goods and services, such as delivering financial protection and security.

2) At the tactical level, meaninglessness is based on the professional's perception of the agency's contribution in handling specific problems or delivering public goods. When agencies adopt managerial policies that focus on output goals that lack a clear relationship with specific societal goals, professionals are more likely to experience the policy as less meaningful.

3) At the operational level, meaninglessness reflects the professionals' perceptions of the contributions their own activities make to dealing with concrete, individual cases, as manifestations of broader societal problems. For instance, are they really helping people? If this is not the case, they will probably experience policy meaninglessness.

(Bekkers, Steijin and Tummers 2009: 689).

The third dimension of alienation presented by Blauner (1964) is social isolation. At this level the worker becomes disillusioned from his workplace, losing his sense of belonging and becoming unable to identify with the organisation. (Blauner 1964: 23; Bekkers, Steijin and Tummers 2009: 690) Bekkers et. All choose to explain this dimension using role conflicts. A

conflict between for instance the professional norms of the professional, the interests of the clients they are meant to serve, and even the intentions and expectations of different policies. When these expectations conflict with one another, the professional faces a role conflict. They describe 4 different logics the professional must cope with.

- 1) The institutional logic: These stem from policy contents, they include rules regulations and goals the professional must abide by.
- 2) The Organizational logic: These are managerial demands that guide proper implementation of the policy.
- 3) The Professional logic: These stem from a form of “professional” etiquette. These are the norms and expectations of the professional’s peers.
- 4) The Client logic: This line of logic stems from the demands and values of the client (citizen) for whom the public professional is working with.

(Bekkers, Steijin and Tummers 2009: 690)

Job insecurity:

Job insecurity is a multidimensional construct encompassing "perceived powerlessness to maintain desired continuity in a threatened job situation ..perceived threat to job features, perceived threat to the total job and powerlessness" (Adkins et.all 2001: 465). Job insecurity is also found to negatively correlate with job satisfaction (Adkins et. all 2001), which incidentally could explain a general tenancy towards lower job satisfaction across significant portions of the labor market during an economic crisis, where job volatility is higher than normal. A study by Staufenbeil and König from 2010 found a weak negative effect of job insecurity on workplace behavior, such as absenteeism, turnover intentions, as well as self perceived job performance and supervisor perceived job performance. However they came to the conclusion that such a model should also take into account the possibility of a reverse effect in the form of individual action by employees to improve their standing among their peers and with their supervisors, as a means to counteract job insecurity. In short job insecurity’s effect can go both ways, it can either motivate to individual action, or demotivate employees (also it may conceivably have no effect), and Staufenbeil and König's study seems to indicate a weak negative result (Staufenbiel and König 2010). Adkins et. all. (2001) indicate in their article that long term contracts tend to mitigate job insecurity even when

informed of a crisis where by contracts such as tenure will not be taken into account if staff members need to be cut. Sufficient and realistic information about a crisis and the steps that are being taken seem to have a negative effect on job insecurity, as well as having a positive effect on job satisfaction. In contrast a lack of information and/or a lack of a long term contract tends to correlate positively with job insecurity and negatively with job satisfaction (Adkins et. All. 2001: 475-476).

Meaningful work

In contrast to alienation, it is perfectly reasonable that teachers could, and as I have found in my interviews, find working as a teacher to be meaningful. In this sense I mean that teachers seem to ascribe an intrinsic value to “teaching” and being a teacher. This leads us into the theoretical grounds of “meaningful work”. Neal Chalofsky (2003) attempted to analyze recent attempts at constructing a concept of meaningful work and the meaning of work itself in his article “An Emerging construct for meaningful work” Though he admitted that the scope of the field was too large to be captured by one article he none the less discovered 3 different aspects of work that provide meaning. The sense of self, the work itself and sense of balance. All three, according to Chalofsky are intertwined and a balance of all three are required to achieve an integrated wholeness which provides work with meaning.

Sense of self:

- Bringing ones whole self to work (mind, body, emotion and spirit)
- Recognizing and developing one's potential
- Knowing one's purpose in life and how work fits into that purpose
- Having a positive belief system about achieving one's purpose

The work itself:

- The act of performing
- Challenge, creativity, learning and continuous growth
- The opportunity to carry out one's purpose through work
- Autonomy, empowerment

The sense of balance:

- The balance of work self and personal self

- The balance of spiritual self and work self
- The balance of giving to one self and giving to others

(Chalofsky 2003: 77-78)

Chalofsky's model for understanding meaning at work requires a careful interplay of all 3 of the above factors to create an integrated wholeness. However it does not entirely reject the notion that one might find more meaning in one of the 3 aspects than in the others.

We can in this instance view meaningful work as the antithesis of alienation. A work situation that is seen as meaningful and rewarding by the employee cannot simultaneously be meaningless and draining, and vice versa. However in the case of policy driven public sector jobs we have two separate dimensions; the policy and the work place. As we will see later in this thesis, the one can be alienating while the other can be meaningful. In this case, as mentioned previously, teachers find their job to be enjoyable and meaningful, but view recent policy decisions as meaningless and at worst harmful.

5. Data and method

Qualitative research:

“Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of theoretical lens and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.” (Creswell 2007: 37) Qualitative research is a wide field or paradigm of research methods and tools that differ from quantitative methods in their focus on a larger volume of information from a smaller group of individuals. Observation and interviews are typical means of obtaining qualitative data (Creswell 2007, Tjora 2012) Creswell outlines 9 features that describe qualitative research

- 1) Natural setting: Qualitative researchers tend to gather data in the field where the participants experience the issue or problem. Typically information is gathered by talking to and observing people directly.*
- 2) Researcher as a Key instrument: The qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behavior and interviewing participants.*
- 3) Multiple sources of data: Typically data is collected from multiple sources rather than relying on a single form of data.*
- 4) Inductive data analysis: Typically a bottom up style is used when developing patterns categories and themes. Data is organized into increasingly abstract units of information.*
- 5) Participants meanings: Researchers focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, rather than the meaning researchers or writers bring with them in to the field.*
- 6) Emergent design: The initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed, as it emerges from the findings over the course of the project. All phases and processes can change or shift over time after the researcher enters the field.*
- 7) Theoretical lens: Researchers often view their studies through a theoretical lens, though*

sometimes the study may be organized around identifying the social, political or historical context of the problem under study.

8) Interpretive inquiry: In qualitative research the researcher make interpretations of what they see, hear and understand. These interpretations cannot be separated from the researcher's background. Furthermore participants as well as other readers can make their own interpretations after the research report is issued.

9) Holistic account: Qualitative researchers develop a complex picture of the problem or issue under study. Researchers are bound by identifying the complex interactions of factors in any situation.

(Crewell 2007: 37-39)

Research data:

The data used for this thesis consists of 12 focused interviews lasting between 15 and 20 minutes in length. The interviews were transcribed in their entirety, averaging about 4-5 pages each this added up to nearly 55 pages of transcribed interview data and an additional hour of audio data that was not transcribed. The interviews took place over one and a half weeks, of this time I spent 5 days in total at the school in question, volunteered as an assistant in between interviews. Working there along side my research gave me some valuable insight and context to answers given by the teachers during the interview. However I was unable to take field notes, as I was usually busy helping children or taking care of routine tasks for the teachers.

Informants:

I came into contact with the 12 teachers and the school they work at through an informal contact of mine. She introduced me to the school and some of the teachers there. Because I live in Norway, I had no way of talking to them in person, so interviews were organized mainly via e-mail and my contact in the US helped by scheduling most of the interviews for me. It was my understanding that the teachers volunteered rather than being hand picked, so this prevents some degree of selection bias.

The teachers were all female, there did not appear to be any male teachers at the school, so it is still representative of that particular school. They varied in age between 58 and 30, and had a variety of different educational backgrounds. They also varied in experience in the field of teaching, varying from 3 to 30 years of teaching. Though it should be noted that they were all Caucasian and furthermore all of them were raised in the United States as far as I was made aware. As such the teachers interviewed in this thesis are not representative of teachers in state in general. They are however fairly representative of this school in particular.

Most of the teachers were married, and have children. Some reportedly did not know how much they earn, or only knew their combined income with their husband. But from what I gathered their incomes varied between 30 000 dollars a year and 50 000. Although some teachers reported that they were not the main breadwinner in their home, so their income was not important to their standard of living. This indicates that most if not all of the teachers interviewed are middle class as well. This factor in particular is important as it partially explains why the economic situation is of less importance to them.

Data collection - Focused interviews:

The “choice” of focused interviews was not so much a choice as it was a necessity in this particular case. I had one week to conduct 13 (only 12 made it in) interviews, all of which either had to occur during one hour planning periods, after work or during the weekend. The first two were not optimal for long interviews. After a lot of back and forth on whether I should interview them during the school week, or get everyone on the weekends for longer interviews, I and my contact person agreed it was best I take the former route of interviewing the teachers while they were already at school, rather than going for longer interviews on the weekend. The complex situation and the level of stress this imposed on the teachers meant that keeping the interviews short and efficient was the best solution. However due to the nature of the topic I still needed some length in the interviews. As such they lasted between 15 and 30 minutes. Starting with a quick set of warm up questions, about what they chose to be teachers, before quickly transitioning to the main topics, like what they like and dislike about their job as well as the decisions by the state government, finally I closed off with some neutral demographic questions and gave them an opportunity to speak their mind if there was anything they would like to say but did not get to.

Focused interviews are a shorter more efficient form of interview technique; primarily useful when the topic is narrow enough to allow the researcher to quickly gather information on the topic with a few quick open questions. It is most efficient when the topic is not particularly sensitive and the researcher can quickly earn the trust of his informants. (Tjora 2012) While the topic in my case was relatively sensitive (by this I mean the topic is of emotional significance to many of the teachers), but it was easy enough to get the teachers to open up about the topic none the less.

Focused interviews work best, according to Aksel Tjora (2012) when the topic isn't particularly sensitive, when the topic is focused enough, and the interviewer can earn the trust of the informant quickly. It also requires a slightly more focused interview guide, and a slightly stricter pacing. (Tjora 2012: 126-132) In order to make this happen I needed to go through several iterations of my interview guide. Until I had what seemed to be the most central questions of my project. However some degree of modification was necessary during and after interviews. The benefit of having short interviews one after the other was that I was constantly in thinking mode with regards to my interviews and my guide, allowing me to make quick adjustments in order to capture new topics that were brought up over the course of subsequent interviews. Keeping the interviews short without rushing, and keeping the stress level low while keeping the interviews flowing were among the greater challenges faced when using this process. However even these shorter interviews provided a wealth of data to analyze.

Interview Guide:

As mentioned above I had only a limited amount of time for my interviews so it was most practical to borrow some techniques from focused interviewing style as presented by Tjora (2012) For instance I did not waste much time before getting to my main questions. However I did manage my questions to the lighter questions before getting to anything that might put them on edge. However I did want to keep my interviews longer than 10 minutes so I kept the questions fairly open, while allowing for them to be answered in a fairly efficient manner. I also had to stay relatively strict in my interview structure in order to maintain a sense of order as well as keep things flowing naturally.

My interview guide started with two short warm up questions:

- What in your past made you want to become a Teacher?
- What sort of education did you get before becoming a teacher?

These two questions ask for a little background information from the teachers but without being stressful. They also relate to the main topic rather well, providing by extension some information about what makes teachers want to teach.

The next set of questions can be seen equatable to first question in phenomenological methodology: “What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon?” (Creswell 2007: 61) However I have divided it up in order to make for more precise questioning and to keep the conversation going.

- How would you describe an average day in your life as a teacher?
 - What do you like about teaching?
 - What do you dislike about teaching?
 - Is there anything you would like to change?
 - (-What is the most important part of being a teacher to you?)

The Final one, in parenthesis was added after a few interviews. I felt it fit in well. I did prepare follow up questions over time, but I only had these written down in a notebook to bring to interviews. Among other things I hooked on to reoccurring topics like Micromanagement, and seeing the students “get it”.

Prior to the next set of questions I went through a short overview of the policy changes over the past few years, with regards to the wage freezes, and cuts to tenure and masters benefits. After which I posed the following questions, which can be seen as the second question in phenomenological methodology: “What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?”

- How do you feel about these decisions by the State government?
 - Why do you feel these decisions were made?

- How would you say this has affected your day to day experience of being a teacher?
 - Do you feel like you can do your job as a teacher satisfactorily with the resources at your disposal?

- How would you say your personal life has changed?
 - Mortgage?
 - Moved recently?

There is a deviation here from the normal second question, in that I have purposely chosen a context I want to know about. This has to do with the purpose of the thesis, being to uncover whether teachers are being alienated by policy and why they choose to teach. I have however chosen to ask the questions in reverse order, as I did not want my informants to get tired out early on by having to answer too many negative questions. Furthermore, akin to the previous segment, I divided the question up for the same of sorting the topic and conversation flow. I eventually dropped the follow up questions about mortgage and moved recently, and simply asked if they felt they were impacted economically.

Phenomenological methodology:

From the outset, this project was inspired by phenomenological sociology, though I did borrow from grounded theory as well. John W. Creswell (2007) described phenomenology “Whereas a narrative study reports the life of a single individual, a phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept of phenomenon.” (Creswell 2007: 57) Further he describes phenomenology as reducing from individual experiences to the very essence of their shared experience, ultimately focusing on the universal for all participants rather than the individual. (Creswell 2007: 58) However it should be noted, that while I was inspired by phenomenology in the process of working on this project, I have not tied myself to any one particular mode of thinking, or any particular method. Rather I’ve used methods as tools where I felt they fit in. However the focus on the shared experiences of my informants rather than on individual experiences is in keeping with a phenomenological approach.

Creswell (2007) presents 8 procedures for conducting Phenomenological research:

- 1) “The researcher determines if the research problem is best examined using a phenomenological approach.” Typically research where the focus on understanding several individuals shared experience of a phenomenon. And where understanding these common experiences can lead to a deeper understanding of the features of this phenomenon.
- 2) Where a Phenomenon of interest has been identified. Anger, professionalism or what it means to be a wrestler for example. In the case of this thesis, why teachers teach despite being alienated by policy decisions.
- 3) “The researcher recognizes and specifies the broad philosophical assumptions of phenomenology.” In order for the researcher to fully describe how participants view a phenomenon researcher must “bracket out” as much of their personal experience as possible.
- 4) The Data is collected from individuals who have personal experience with the phenomenon, typically in the form of interviews, but other forms of qualitative methods can be used.
- 5) “The Participants are asked two broad, general questions: What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?” Though other questions may be asked, and the two questions above may be formulated differently In the case of this thesis my questions were divided up significantly to make for more efficient interviews as mentioned previously.
- 6) Phenomenological data involves building on data from the first and second research questions (mentioned above) analysts go through the data and highlight significant statements, sentences or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon. Next the researcher develops clusters of meaning (coded structures of meaning) from these significant statements into themes.
- 7) These significant statements and themes are then used to write a “textual description”. They are also used to write a description of the context or setting that influenced how the participants experienced the phenomenon, a “structural description”.

8) From structural descriptions the researcher then writes a composite description that presents the essences of the phenomenon.

(Creswell 2007: 60-62)

It should be noted, for the sake of specificity, that my thesis is in no way a strictly phenomenological study. I have relied on phenomenology as a helpful tool when conducting my research. However my findings led me away from strictly describing the phenomenon of being a teacher during a major policy shift.

Analytical method:

One particular challenge I faced when analyzing my data, was that going in open ended as I did, without a concrete theoretical backing meant that the questions in my interview guide was not tailored to the theories I would eventually find myself using. I did not have the raw data to create my own theoretical understanding of the field. So the next step was to follow the data I had to the theories I eventually used to understand and analyze the data further.

Precedural deductive inductive method

Ascending	Descending
Theory	Theory
Discussion av concepts and use of theory	Concepts or models
Developing concepts	Main Topics
Categorizing	Recontextualization – data encoding
Coding	Analyzed data
Processing Raw data	Raw empirical data
Generating empirical data in the chosen field (selection)	Generating empirical data in the chosen field (selection)

(Tjora 2012: 175 Oversatt)

The deductive inductive method of research played a crucial role in how I formed my topic and came to use the theoretical approach that I have. The deductive inductive method is a process of first working ones way down from the theoretical level to the data level, then using you're findings in the data level to work your way back up again. (Tjora 2012: 174-176) I started originally with the theme of the economic crisis, and after several revisions I wanted to look at why teachers continued teaching. Starting with economic theory and alienation I worked my way down, and created my interview guide, and began interviewing. Once I had collected my data, I went through a process similar to that described by Tjora (2012: 179-180) and generated a series of codes, simple short sentences or words to describe a phenomenon that caught my interest. This eventually led me to policy alienation theory and meaningful work theory. After that I worked my way back down again with my new analytical framework and sorted my findings into different categories to support or disprove my theories. This eventually generated new findings to analyze. The inductive deductive presented above is meant to be a cyclic method of working with data. As such my raw data has been analyzed multiple times at different levels using different theories until I finally landed on the theoretical approach I've presented in this thesis.

6. Ethical considerations

Informed consent

All research and interviews used in this thesis have been conducted under the guidelines outlined by the Norwegian Research Ethics committee. All informants interviewed in this thesis were capable of giving legal consent on their own behalf to participate in the interviews. No individuals interviewed were under the age of 18 nor were any of the informants deemed mentally unfit to give their own legal consent. All informants were informed in advance per e-mail with adequate disclosure on what the project was about as well as what their participation entailed. Further all of the Interview participants were given the option to at any time withdraw their participation from the project. Furthermore all participants were informed that they may at any time withdraw any part or the entirety of their interview up until the project ends and the thesis is handed in. All 12 Interview participants were given an additional explanation in person prior to the interview, and were asked to sign a form of consent to be interviewed (Forskningsetiskekomiteer 2006).

Special precautions due to conducting research at an elementary school.

Due to the research project taking place in an elementary school where children who require their parents consent to be interviewed or studied, special caution was taken when recording data, not to accidentally record any information that could be linked back to the children at the school. No attempt was made to gather any data on the children at the school at any time prior to, during or after the field study was complete. No names or personal information about any of the children at the school were recorded. Further more a accidental recordings of personal information that may exist in the audio transcripts from the interviews has at this time been erased (Forskningsetiskekomiteer 2006).

Full anonymity for participants

In order to ensure the anonymity of all of the participants involved, no names were used during the interviews, furthermore all transcriptions from said interviews have been made anonymous and any accidental use of names have been altered so that they cannot be traced back to the interview participant or other individuals. Any lists of the participants that were not made anonymous were kept in a safe place, only accessible by myself. All lists and all

identifiable documents have at this point in time been destroyed. All email addresses and contact information as well as all e-mails sent back and forth are also deleted to prevent tracing (Forskningsetiskekomiteer 2006).

Full anonymity for the participant School, it's staff and students

To protect the anonymity of the Hilltop Elementary, it's staff and all of the children at the school. The name of the school has been changed, and no identifiable features of the school, it's staff or it's location within the state of North Carolina was recorded or published in this thesis. However the nature of the study being focused on North Carolina forced me to disclose the information that the school is in North Carolina. As such precautions were taken to further minimize any identifiable traits that could be traced back to the participating school (Forskningsetiskekomiteer 2006).

Purpose collection and handling of personal data

No personal data collected intentionally or otherwise has been disclosed to anyone who was not directly involved in the project. No personal data has been passed on to any external sources, agencies or companies for any purpose. All data collected was used for the purpose of producing this thesis, no data was collected for any other purpose (Forskningsetiskekomiteer 2006).

This project was not sponsored.

7. Analysis and Initial findings

In this chapter I will be presenting my findings from my analysis of the data I collected from the interviews I discussed in the previous chapter. First I will present my initial findings which led me to my final choice of theory and my angle of analysis. After that I will present a few terms that the teachers used that are helpful for understanding the outlook of the teachers. After that I will present my findings in light of policy alienation and meaningful work. Finally I have some additional findings that do not necessarily fit into either category.

Initial findings

"These decisions are being made by people who aren't teachers.." Unsurprisingly most of the teachers reported dissatisfaction with the decisions made by the government to freeze their wages, remove tenure and benefits for teachers holding a masters degree. What was interesting however was the uniformity in their view of the generalized individuals making these decisions. While many of the teachers understood that the decisions were made in the interest of balancing a tight budget and improving education, most claimed that if "they had spent some time in the classroom" that they would have understood better what needs to be done. Generally the teachers I interviewed, regardless of age, felt that the people making the decisions lacked insight into the day to day practice of education and that was where their faulty decisions stemmed from.

Many also have grievances with the way the common core has been implemented in their school (and by extension in North Carolina in general). They perceive the extra paperwork and assessments as being meaningless, and feel it is not beneficial for the children. This brings their situation up to the second level of policy alienation, as they are experiencing the policy and its implementation as meaningless because it does not benefit the clients (in this case the children). Some teachers even expressed apathy towards the government and school system in general (with one jokingly expressing that she is considering moving out of the country).

However despite the negativity towards the way policy has been drafted and implemented, the teachers seem to be remarkably happy with their job. Several teachers see it as their calling in

life to teach, while others describe it as a childhood dream that they had made real. A few were more pragmatic about it, noting things like good vacation arrangements that afford them valuable time with family. The juxtaposition of teachers loving their job, and perceiving it as meaningful while simultaneously having so many grievances with the way policy has been handled is what initially led me to analyzing the data on two planes, one of meaningful work and policy alienation.

Terms:

“Higher ups”:

During my interviews the generalized term “higher ups” was frequently used when mentioning decisions and policies that the teachers felt were unfair or pointless. This notion of a nameless block of decision makers that preside over them indicates a sense of distance between the teachers I interviewed and the “policy makers” in the government. More importantly, I gathered from my interviews that many teachers feel that this sense of “distance” is mutual. The policy makers neither know nor care for the teachers, and the teachers neither know nor care for the “policy makers”. The “higher ups” seem to be the group in between the two that implement the policy introduced by the policy makers. I also gathered that the teachers note a difference between the administration and the “higher ups” indicating that the higher ups referred to are likely government administration and other administration that are external to the school. They also make the distinction between generalized higher ups and policy makers at the government level. The higher ups may also refer to the general bureaucracy between teachers at the bottom and policy makers at the top.

“Policy makers”:

The teachers (and myself after I adopted the term) refer to government administration and the state government as either “the state government” or policy makers. They seem to make the distinction between these “policy makers” whom they know belong to the government and make policy decisions, and the aforementioned “higher ups” whom are a broadly defined group of decision makers responsible for the implementation of policy in the school system. The policy makers are generally described as ignorant or uncaring about the teachers and education.

Findings:

Policy alienation:

Powerlessness:

Strategic powerlessness – Higher ups and policy makers:

Interviewer:

Alright, and we've already ended up into the topic of, How you feel about the decisions of the state government, to freeze teachers wages 5 times, and ect. So why do you feel those decisions were made by the (state) government.

Respondent:

Because I don't think the people in our government have any idea about what goes on in a school, let alone a typical day in a classroom. They're not educators they don't.. even if you know, even if you are an educated person, you don't know what it's like in a class room, in a school, day after day after day. Unless you're in here and being a part of it. And I don't think they have any idea. And I don't.. I think they're clueless about what we do, and how much time we put into our students. I feel like they just want to keep piling on, more and more and more, and taking away more and more and more resources from us. Including our pay... And you could, you know, really put yourself into it and there's just not the time for that. But then there's also, I can't think of the word I'm looking for, were not given permission to do that I guess. You know, its not.. they don't want that anymore. They just want us to be little robots, who teach what were supposed to teach and you know, go about our day like robots, and were not.

In many of the interviews teachers seemed, unsurprisingly, distressed about decisions made by policy makers to freeze their salary, take away their tenure and cut benefits for masters degree holders. However the teachers were more focused on the implementation of new curriculum and increased levels of testing. The quote above expresses very adequately that these decisions are being handed down without much consultation from teachers. Many of the teachers talked about how the government and higher ups didn't know what was going on in their classrooms, and expressed that they felt like their work wasn't valued. Some even said policy makers don't seem to care about education in general. Wages also came up frequently but mainly in conjunction with “the value” of the work they do. Most teachers seemed to down play the notion that money was important, however some pointed out their wages were not reasonable with regards to the amount of work and level of education they have. This

seems to indicate that the teachers feel their wages should at least be higher in order to be respectable for the level of work they do. Many also mentioned this with regards to how important education is for the children. It seems clear from this that many of the teachers I interviewed were stressed by how devalued they felt in the eyes of the higher ups and the government and that they have no way of effecting the changes being made. This is coherent with Strategic powerlessness as described by Bekkers, Steijin and Tummers (2009) AS mentioned before strategic powerlessness refers to the professionals powerlessness to effect policy decisions, or when these decisions are drafted without consulting the professionals (Bekkers, Steijin and Tummers 2009: 688-689).

Tactical powerlessness – The short straw

Interviewer:

So do you feel like you can do your job satisfactorily with the resources at your disposal?

Respondent:

I can. We don't have everything we need but...when they take things away and take things away and take things away it's sort of like... what else are they going to take away, you know. It gets to the point where we are like ???

Interviewer:

Because I have heard that they also had to cut teacher's assistant's hours because of the budget...

Respondent:

And we need assistants, its hard to do - I mean I couldn't teach kindergarten - well I could teach kindergarten without my assistant but I wouldn't be able to teach as well without my assistant.

The above quote summarizes the situation as many of the teachers describe it. Though in a more blunt way than many other respondents. Another worried teacher said that “the government was just looking for an easy cut, and that was us” in short the teachers I interviewed seemed concerned about how limited their resources and time have become. Some teachers who were used to having assistants were also concerned about having them taken away to do other things. Wages are also an issue, as many teachers, as mentioned previously felt they were being undervalued. This ties in well with Tactical powerlessness which, as I've mentioned before, was defined as the professionals lack of control over how policy is implemented in the organization, including (though not exclusive to) how resources are allocated amongst the organizations units (Bekkers, Steijin and Tummers 2009: 688-689). In this case it's clear teachers feel that resources are being taken away from them and

redirected elsewhere. This was also one of the more common topics, in part because it's one of the few topics I had direct questions about, since my original topic was to do with their reaction to wage freezes during an economic crisis. However it also seemed to pop up regularly even when we were talking about other topics. As such it seems to be of significance to the teachers I interviewed.

Operational powerlessness – Micromanagement:

Interviewer:

Ok, and. I know you've already been into it, but what would you say you dislike about teaching, now a' days.

Respondent:

I dislike all of the paperwork that I'm required to do. I dislike all of the assessing that I'm required to do. I think assessment is great, when it can be used to help the children grow. But our assessments.. its just too much, and a lot of it honestly is pointless. I dislike the testing, the end of grade test. I think its unneeded pressure on the kids, and the teachers. I dislike how micromanaged we are these days. And we don't feel like we have the time, or the.. I don't know what the word is. The time or the.. go ahead to be creative and to do our own thing. Like we used to. I mean it used to kinda be an art, where you had the time to plan these awesome lessons. But now our time is used in ways that are not necessarily benefiting children. So were not able to put our heart and soul into these great lessons, because we don't have the time to do it. Because of all the other "stuff" that we have to do. That's really frustrating.

Operational powerlessness was a professional's lack of control over day to day implementation of policy. Or professional discretion as it is also called (Bekkers, Steijin and Tummers 2009: 688-689). Micromanagement is the opposite of discretion in that it implies being controlled down to the smallest detail. Though it is an exaggeration to call these teachers micromanaged, many of the teachers felt similarly to the above quote, that they were being controlled more than they used to. Both with the adoption of the common core which was more explicit in describing what they were to do, than their previous curriculum. But also because they felt their teaching time was more restricted due to the amount of assessment they had to do, and the amount of feedback and paperwork they had to do. Some teachers even said when asked that they were worried they wouldn't be able to do their job as a teacher well anymore. However, a discrepancy from the normal notion of "micromanagement" is they were not being micromanaged by their direct superiors so much as by the policy's and regulations in place for teachers. This further underlines the importance in viewing this in terms of policy alienation rather than normal workplace alienation.

Meaninglessness:

Strategic meaninglessness:

Interviewer :

On the opposite end you were saying you don't like all of the work. Could you go into more detail of what particular work it is that is bothersome then.

R: Respondent:

OK the part that I don't like...um...probably the amount of testing that we have to do. We're constantly testing the kids on assessments in reading especially and right after we finish testing them in reading its called benchmarking them at the 4th grade level its time to start the whole process over again... You go nonstop all day, I don't mind that, but I do mind that the testing part takes me away from actually teaching.

The above quote and the one I used for operational powerlessness both point to teachers view of many policies being pointless and not beneficial to the clients (to the teachers this is both the children and by extension their parents). Strategic meaninglessness as we talked about earlier implies that the policy being implemented is not tackling any of the problems that they are supposed to (Bekkers, Steijin and Tummers 2009: 689). In this case, policies were implemented to streamline education and improve feedback to both parents and the government. However in the eyes of the teachers the amount of paperwork, testing and meetings is hindering them as educators and not to any real benefit to the children they are teaching. Aside from the three factors I've mentioned many of the teachers do seem to see value in the actual content of the policies, but they are struggling with the way it has been implemented and what they view as unnecessary "work" that takes away from their teaching time. Some however also have qualms with the content of the new policies as well, but it wasn't the general trend.

Tactical meaninglessness:

Respondent:

I think the decisions they are making are bad for children. I think it's just very simple. There's not much that's happening in recent days that is really truly good for children.

Interviewer:

And why do you feel they are making those decisions?

Respondent:

I think that education has become big business. I think it's driven by greed, just like many other big businesses. If you look at the things they are spending high dollars on, the things they are spending high dollars on is this new software and that new program, and this new technology, and very little of it is actually doing anything to really raise the academic level. They talk about us competing globally, and they're not preparing students to compete globally. It's a bunch of rhetoric that for me doesn't amount to anything. It's just, it's just poorly managed budgets, and uhm a lot of ignorance is what I think.

The above quote summarizes two particular issues that many teachers had with the way policy was being implemented, a shifting focus toward output goals and investments in unnecessary tools for assessments and an increase in testing, assessments and feedback. Though this is the only time output goals (competing globally) was mentioned directly, the second issue was more commonly referred to, this issue was that resources are being spent on things that were not directly beneficial for the students, as well as the aforementioned amount of time spent on testing from the previous segment. I've chosen to view the investment in the iPads and assessment software as a form of output focus. Many of them refer to the excess amount of assessments as meaningless, and as we noted in the previous segment, many teachers also see it as getting in their way. This also seems to be a form of output focus, as many teachers feel that the testing has become more important than teaching or Output (assessments and feedback) taking priority over delivering a social good (education) in the context of tactical meaningfulness. This can be viewed as tactical meaningfulness, which as we described earlier has to do with professionals' experience that tactical decisions in implementation of policy are not handling societal problems well, or failing to deliver social goods (education). If the focus of the policy seems to be on output goals (Assessments, grades and competition in this case) then they are more likely to be viewed as meaningless (Bekkers, Steijin and Tummers 2009: 689). From the data I have collected this seems to be the sentiment that many teachers share, that the policies being implemented are shifting the focus from education to evaluation.

Operational meaningfulness:

Interviewer:

Do you still feel you can do your job satisfactorily with the resources available to you?

Respondent:

Yes, I feel like I can so far, but I feel like that's probably going to be changing in the next couple years. I have been able to work around the poor decision making, and I've been able to work in spite of the poor decision making. I wouldn't say that I have all the physical resources that I need, but we make due. And when you think about what children need at this age, it's really very little. Uhm they need to be spending time outside, digging in dirt, collecting samples, taking walks, drawing nature, I mean that's all stuff that's free. But that time has to be available to do that, and when they are filling your schedule in your day with all these other ridiculous things that aren't even meant for first graders, I mean it really detracts from their overall education.

Operational meaninglessness as we mentioned in the theory chapter of this book. Is whether the professional feels that the work they are doing is actually helping deal with the specific needs of their clients (Bekkers, Steijin and Tummers 2009: 689). In our case, if the teachers don't feel that the education they are providing is helping the kids or that they are no longer able to do their job (teaching) adequately because of policy changes, it is safe to assume that is an example of Operational meaninglessness. This only appeared in a couple of my interviews. One of my questions "Do you feel you can do your job as a teacher satisfactory with the resources at your disposal" ties in well with this issue. And most of the teachers felt that they still could do what they felt they had to do. Despite many being worried that the policy changes were to the detriment of the students. However it should be noted that this question was asking teachers to evaluate themselves, which is arguably more difficult to do than evaluating others. However this still indicates that most of the teachers I've interviewed were not experiencing operational meaninglessness, this correlates with the findings that indicate that teachers find their jobs meaningful. As we will get to in the following chapter, certain aspects of policy alienation can directly impact the teachers experience of their workplace as meaningful.

Social Isolation:

Looking back once again to the theory chapter of this thesis, the third and final form of policy alienation identified by Bekkers, Steijin and Tummers (2009) was Social Isolation. They identified 4 different and ultimately competing logics that the professional has to deal with: 1) The institutional logic: These stem from policy contents, they include rules regulations and goals the professional must abide by. 2) The Organizational logic: These are managerial demands that guide proper implementation of the policy. 3) The Professional logic: These

stem from a form of “professional” etiquette. These are the norms and expectations of the professionals peers. And Finally 4) The Client logic: This line of logic stems from the demands and values of the client (citizen) for whom the public professional is working with (Bekkers, Steijin and Tummers 2009: 690). In my studies I have identified these 4 logics for the teachers at hilltop elementary. The new policies including assessments and new curriculum as well as goals of competing globally make up the institutional logic. Meetings and paperwork make up the organizational logic. Being an educator and as one of my respondents said “teaching to the whole child” comprises the professional logic. Finally the needs of the children and providing them with the knowledge they need makes up the client logic.

Table 1

Institutional logic	Rules, Policy (Curriculum), Requirements (testing)
Organizational logic	Managerial demands (Paperwork, Meetings) also The Ipads and software they are required to use seem to fall here.
Professional logic	Being an Educator
Client logic	Needs of the child: Learning, fun, care among others.

If we look back at the 4 quotes above, we see a trend typical of the rest of the responses in my thesis. The first two show institutional logic (Testing and benchmarking) and organizational logic (Paperwork, Micromanagement) conflicting with the Professional logic (Teaching). In the second two we see examples of institutional logic (poorly managed budgets and poor decision making) conflicting with the client logic (the children's needs and education). This trend continues throughout most of the interview data I've gathered. Teachers often describe both new policies and managerial demands as hindering them in being a good educator. But they only seem to note institutional policies (the new curriculum as well) as being in conflict with the needs of the children (and by extension their parents). The reason Organizational logic doesn't seem to come into conflict with the client logic of the teachers is unclear. However it may correlate with working overtime and taking work home. Nearly all of the teachers I interviewed said they worked overtime, many of them still took work home with them even after substantial overtime. Typically this involves paperwork, grading and so on. It's logical to assume that “teaching” can't really be done after school when the kids have left. It seems then that they are intentionally preventing managerial demands from interfering with the needs of the children, which could be why the two are not in conflict. The same can be

said about the professional logic and client logic, however there is some indication that the needs of the children (client logic) are not exclusively education (client logic) So the two are out of sync to some degree, however that only concerned a few of the teachers, most of them seemed on the contrary to enjoy the many different roles they as teachers are required to fill.

Meaningful work:

Sense of self – “I’ve always wanted to be a teacher”:

Interviewer:

So, What made you want to become a teacher?

Respondent:

My youngest memories were just, worshiping my teachers and, you know loving school and playing school in my bedroom. You know, with the books my stuffed animals all lined up. So I don't know what prompted that, but its just what I've always wanted to do, and always knew I would do. So..

Interviewer:

So its kinda been like a childhood, from childhood.

Respondent:

Yeah! You know, I loved kids even when I was a child. I always loved taking care of kids, and helping kids younger than I was. So I don't know. That's just kinda the role that.. felt like I would always fulfill one day.

The above quote underlines one important thing about the teachers I interviewed, with regards to meaningful work. It fits well with their sense of self because it is what most of them really want to do. For many of the teachers it's what they wanted to do from childhood, for others its something they found out along the way. Sense of self is one aspect of meaningful work.

Which I described earlier in this thesis as bringing ones whole self to work, recognizing and developing one's potential, knowing one's purpose in life and how work fits into that purpose, finally having a positive belief system about achieving one's purpose (Chalofsky 2003: 77-78).

In a sense this is a more extreme case, as this is the end goal or their “purpose” in life, so by extension it fits into their life perfectly. It provides meaning for them to teach, because they identify as teachers. It also provides meaning for them because they can be themselves and they get to do what they want to do.

The job itself:

Interviewer:

How would you describe an average day in your life as a teacher? Say for instance, describe for instance Monday.

Respondent:

Uhm, I get to school about 7 in the morning and I usually leave school between 4 and 5 every day. In between those hours I do anything from teaching, and in kindergarten we are doing letters and numbers. How to sit in a chair and how to walk in a line and how to be nice to the friend sitting next to you, and uhm how to open your milk, and how to - yesterday we had chicken with bones in it, how to eat chicken on a bone. How to cut, how to hold a pencil and write your name. How to button your pants. We are teaching everything that you don't even know that you are teaching while you are teaching it. (laughs) How to put your coat on when we go out to the playground, its constant all day long. And it's nonstop. So when I go home (laughs) I'm exhausted.

Interviewer:

So there aren't that many breaks.

Respondent:

No.

Interviewer:

And, uh I think this might go back to the same topic, but what do you like about teaching?

Respondent:

Most of it is fun, I mean we do the same kinds of things every year but uhm we get to read stories, but we get to see what the kids find interesting and fun. I get to experience what they like, you know. Like this year I have kids that are interested in history so they bring in things that they like, history, or soccer or whatever. So its different things every year, but its still fun and new to them. So its just really fun being around the kids.

Children:

When asked what their favorite part of their job was, or what they felt was the most important part of their job, most teachers mentioned the kids like the above example. Whether it was seeing their smiling faces or the moment when they light up and they finally get it. The teachers gave the impression that working with kids and seeing the direct impact they had on the lives of their students was what made their job worthwhile. While this is not entirely surprising it is a useful finding for this study. As it at the very least rules out the notion that teachers feel that their job is "meaningless" which would be one of the aforementioned stages of workplace alienation, further backing my theory that teachers are primarily experiencing policy alienation.

Many teachers also stated that their job gave them a "good feeling" about themselves and expressed feeling of accomplishment with their work. This also backs the notion that the teachers at hill top elementary view their role as teachers as meaningful. However it should be noted that one of my questions, "What do you feel is the most important part of your job?" could be viewed as implying their job is important, and may have affected their responses to

this question. However responses indicating that they felt their job was meaningful and rewarding, especially with regards to the children, are found even before this question is asked in most interviews.

Challenge:

While most of the teachers (especially the younger teachers) at the school experience their day as being stressful. They seemed to take on a positive tone when talking about the pacing and the notion of “something different” every day. While there seemed to be more mixed feelings about how “hard” their job was, most generally seemed to enjoy the challenge, with many taking pride in their ability to manage it. This is particularly prominent when the teachers were asked if they felt they could still do their job satisfactory, the vast majority did, with only one or two being uncertain. Many identified themselves with regards to this question, as hard workers and talked about how much extra time they devote to their jobs outside of work hours. Several of them noted that they work several hours of overtime regularly and still take some work home with them, though this was experienced as stressful when the work that had to be done was deemed by them to be “unnecessary. The respondents generally seemed confident of their ability to accomplish their job as a teacher. Leading me to believe that did not see the difficulty and volume of their work as purely negative.

The job itself can be source of meaning at work as well. As we mentioned earlier in this thesis in the theory chapter, deriving meaning from work has 4 parts:

- The act of performing
- Challenge, creativity, learning and continuous growth
- The opportunity to carry out one's purpose through work
- Autonomy, empowerment

(Chalofsky 2003: 77-78).

With regards to the two topics brought up here, the engagement and variety of working with children, as well as the challenges that come with it, fit well with this theory. As we mentioned previously in this chapter many of the teachers seemed to enjoy the varied needs of the children they worked with. Some of the teachers flat out stated that working with children

gave meaning to the work that they do as well. The teachers I interviewed described a hectic, varied and challenging but ultimately rewarding workplace experience.

The sense of balance:

A)

R: How would you say then, that your personal life has been effected by the decisions made by the state government.

I: This is my personal life and my professional life, in a lot of ways (laughing) in a lot of ways. No, I mean it like, if you look at the weekend and then I'll like, probably have 3 hours to yourself on like Friday or Saturday. But it definitely, that's what goes, your personal life is what pays the price for that, for teaching.

B)

J: Alright, four years. Have you noticed that your personal life has been affected by these changes over time?

R: Yes. My husband loves it in the summer because he says I'm the best wife ever - and then when the school starts its - I feel like I'm patient all day with my class and keep up the "happy everything is wonderful" attitude for them, and then when I go home, you know, I crash. You know, that's when I get emotional and I cry and I want to quit my job. And he's talking me out of it. Yes, I definitely feel like it's affected me. And one thing, I used to come in on the weekends and do things, and I just has to stop doing that - because we only get two days anyways. Instead of taking the dogs for a walk, I'm like I'm gonna run to the school for a couple hours - a couple hours would turn into four hours and then it would be getting dark. So I had to cut that out. I know there is a lot I could do here on the weekends but that is one change I made.

I felt that both of the above quotes were necessary to explain this particular trend in the interviews. Though, many of the teachers were happy with the extra vacation time in the summer and during Christmas that they could spend with their families or go on vacations, many of the younger teachers noted that their personal time and their family time was being compromised by excess work and stress. Both of the above quotes belong to relatively young teachers, in their early 30's. Teacher A does not have children and is not married, while teacher B is married and has a child. There is a slight difference; in that teacher B (similarly to another young teacher with a small child at home) had to break out of the cycle of working excess overtime. Teacher A however notes that she barely has time for herself. It is however a reoccurring theme that the amount of work that needs to be done outside of work hours upsets the balance of work time and personal time, as well as taking time away from family. This

indicates that younger teachers at Hilltop Elementary trouble with their sense of balance, which could be draining for them. It's interesting however that this is less prominent amongst the older teachers. One possibility is that they have grown accustomed to it after having been in the labor market or having been a teacher for so long, or they are better at managing their time, and not taking on extra responsibilities.

Non find - Job insecurity:

Interviewer:

Alright, have to figure out where I am, sorry... So, um, closing questions. Have you ever considered a different career than teaching?

Respondent:

Oh yeah, many times.

Interviewer:

And what kind of careers have you..

Respondent:

Well that's the thing I'm kind of.. my degree is in education, there's not a lot you can do with an education degree, except for teaching. So I kinda feel, there are definitely days, its not an all the time thing. But after a bad day, or a bad week, I feel kinda trapped. Like there's nothing else I'm really qualified to do. Nor do, Nor am I in a position to be able to, kind of, quit and go out, and make a fresh start. Even if I wanted to, I don't feel like I'm in a position in my personal life that I could do that. That would be a little too risky. But at the same time, I would miss it. As much as I sometimes complain about it, or you know, even though there's a lot of things about it I don't like, I would definitely miss it. And I would kinda feel like a void, in my life, without it. It's kind of a, there's no..

With cuts to teacher tenure, and a relatively volatile labor market in the United States, that has not yet fully recovered from the economic crisis, job instability is a very likely problem in many work places. As we went through in the theory chapter, job insecurity was defined by Adkins et. All (2001: 465) *Job insecurity* is a multidimensional construct encompassing "perceived powerlessness to maintain desired continuity in a threatened job situation ..perceived threat to job features, perceived threat to the total job and powerlessness" And while we have observed plenty of powerlessness in the form of alienation, there was little data indicating that the teachers at Hilltop elementary feared for their jobs, or felt that they were in any real danger of losing their jobs, nor were they particularly worried about finding new employment if they so decided to leave. The only example of genuine concern and feelings of being trapped were the one example above. And even in her case it seemed she was more inclined to stay because she enjoyed her job. As such I could not find sufficient evidence that

job insecurity was an issue, to the degree that only one of the teachers I interviewed even mentioned the cut to tenure as an issue, despite me asking about it. Though It may have been because I asked the question too broadly. However despite my findings, job insecurity is still a stress factor that could have an impact in other schools, possibly more so in more densely populated areas where the competition over teaching positions is fiercer.

Summary:

From the findings in my analysis of the data gathered in my 12 interviews, I've found evidence that the teachers at Hilltop elementary are experiencing policy alienation. I've also found that they also feel that their job is meaningful to them. Several informants also stated that they enjoy their jobs, and that working with the kids is what keeps them coming back to work. As such this explains why many teachers choose to continue working as teachers, and why some of the teachers are more eager to move to a different state, or move to private sector teaching jobs rather than leaving the profession entirely. However with that being said many of the teachers who had experience in other fields were considering changing back to the careers they worked in previously. Such as one who had business experience considering going back into the world of business once they've earned their government retirement plan. This indicates that the policy alienation is severe enough that it is ruining some of the teacher's view of the field of education in general. Also many of the older teachers were considering early retirement once they have earned their retirement plan. Until that point they are too far invested to change careers or retire until they have earned their retirement.

8. Discussion – Teachers love their job but not their “work”

Interviewer:

Ok, so to get back to the question I was going to ask you, what do you like about teaching?

Respondent:

I love everything about teaching.... What i love about teaching is making a difference in a kids life, and seeing that light bulb just all of a sudden go off there they finally “get it”. You know, when you finally see them, “ohhh now I understand how double digit multiplication works,” so its just making a difference in a students life. So thats what I like best about it.

Interviewer:

Yeah I’ve heard about the light bulb going off.

Respondent:

Yeah when you see it, it really is an awesome feeling

J: On the opposite end you were saying you don’t like all of the work. Could you go into more detail of what particular work it is that is bothersome then.

R: OK the part that I don’t like...um...probably the amount of testing that we have to do. We’re constantly testing the kids on assessments in reading especially and right after we finish testing them in reading its called benchmarking them at the 4th grade level its time to start the whole process over again. So you feel like you’re going nonstop all day there’s um , there’s no downtime. You know when I first started teaching, occasionally the kids could be working by themselves or with partners and I could be grading papers at my desk. That’s a thing of the past. You go nonstop all day, I don’t mind that, but I do mind that the testing part takes me away from actually teaching.

The above quote is an extended portion of one of the quotes from earlier in this article. I've brought it up for the purpose of discussing a different dimension of this study. The goal of this study was to highlight the stresses of teaching at this school and North Carolina with regards to the policy changes over the past 6 years, and to uncover why they in particular choose to stay despite the difficulties. We have uncovered that the teachers are experiencing Policy alienation and simultaneously find their work to be meaningful. It would be simple enough to conclude that the teachers who are staying find enough meaning in their work to keep working through the hardships of stressful new policy and sub par wages. In fact some of the teachers I interviewed explained their decision to keep working as a teacher in that manner. However there is another element that I would like to discuss in this chapter. Up until now I have been treating Policy alienation and meaningful work as separate dimensions that are effecting the teachers. However the above quote shows another dilemma. These two dimensions can interact and interfere with one another. And Identified a few ways in which

Policy and by extension policy alienation is interfering with the aspects of work that are meaningful to them.

Policy preventing teachers from teaching.

As we have mentioned previously, one part of deriving meaning from the work itself is the act of performing. In this case it means the act of being a teacher, and educating. Being able to do this and to do it well is a means of deriving meaning from work. All of the teachers I interviewed, some I showed in the previous chapter, felt that their job was important and many derived meaning from being a teacher, and from the act of teaching itself. However many of these teachers also noted that assessments, meetings and paperwork among other things are taking their time away from being a teacher, like in the example above. This means that the teachers have to spend a greater deal of their time performing tasks that are alienating rather than tasks they derive meaning from. By having to invest more time in these tasks, their work is being slowly deprived of meaning. This could potentially lead teachers to find their workplace meaningless over time, thus prompting them to leave their jobs.

Micromanagement depriving teachers of autonomy.

In the theory chapter of this thesis we discussed the preferred workplace environment of professionals. Professionals like elementary school teachers are more likely to feel comfortable in autonomous workplaces rather than heteronomous ones (Cox and Wood 1980: 2) However as I've noted in the analysis chapter, the teachers at Hill Top elementary expressed concern that they were experiencing being increasingly micromanaged. One teacher even jokingly equated it to them being expected to be like little robots. Micromanagement can be viewed as the polar opposite of autonomy, as true micromanagement involves controlling the work of the individual down to the slightest details. While what the teachers are experiencing is a far cry from true micromanagement the sentiment is the same, they are being deprived of their autonomy and discretion in their workplace. Also as has been noted in the previous chapter, autonomy and empowerment are a part of deriving meaning from work itself. Depriving teachers of their autonomy in their workplace environment will likely impact negatively on the teachers workplace experience, preventing them from deriving meaning from their work. Consequently this could also deprive the act of being a teacher of its intrinsic meaning.

Overwork – upsetting the balance of work and personal time

Looking back to the previous chapter, I noted that many of the teachers were experiencing an imbalance between their private life and their work life. Their work life was extending into their private life, denying them the opportunity to enjoy their personal life and recover from the stress of their work. This was expressed either as not having as much time for their family or not having much time to themselves. Some teachers expressed that this balance issue was present before the policy changes, but many also noted that they were experiencing more overwork time over the recent years, usually expressed as “taking more work home with them”. As you may recall from the previous chapters the Sense of balance is a part of meaningful work, and is one of the 3 parts of obtaining an integrated wholeness, along side the sense of self and the work itself. The issue of balance is important in the context of the meaningful work theory I've adopted, as a lack of any one of the 3 different forms of deriving meaning from work can prevent the individual from obtaining a sense of integrated wholeness. In short teachers cannot fully appreciate their work if they don't have a sense of balance, in this case if they cannot enjoy their private life because their work life is interfering. Further upsetting this balance could push teachers away from deriving meaning from their work, thus slowly making their work seem progressively meaningless.

Interviewer:

What would the circumstances have to be like to feel like you had to change jobs?

Respondent:

What would the circumstances be?

Interviewer:

Yeah, what would push you over the limit?

Respondent:

I would say they are pretty close to the limit now. I feel like if one more big idea is implemented like the m-class, ipad dibbles thing that they have done with this read to achieve thing that they're gonna hold back the third graders if they're not at the third grade reading level - I feel like if one more great idea that's gonna change education forces us to do something else besides give these kids what they need. (Popping noise) I'm out!

The threat to the schools future

When questioned on the topic of whether or not they had considered a different career. The more experienced teachers typically said that they would stay on until retirement. With some specifically saying they would leave as soon as they had earned their retirement and find a

different career or simply retire as soon as that was a possibility. On the other hand the younger teachers were typically more amiable to the idea of changing careers or changing states. I would have benefited from more questions directly aimed at this topic, however I was unaware at the time that it would be a topic for my thesis. However from what I can gather there is a very real threat to the sustainability of the school under these circumstances. If the younger teachers are pushed to leave and the older teachers take their retirement early, then the school will have to replace staff at an accelerated rate. Also if wages remain stagnant that could lessen the desirability of teaching as a career for many young people. As such they would have a smaller pool of teachers from which to hire new staff.

9. Conclusion – Policy alienation versus meaningful work part 2

Summary:

In this thesis we have taken a look at the situation of North Carolina teachers, who have experienced a number of significant changes to their work conditions over the past 6 years between 2007 and 2013 when I started work on this thesis. Among these changes, a total of 5 wage freezes during and after the 2007-2008 financial crisis in the United States, a total overhaul of their curriculum with the adoption of the common core and an increased focus on assessments and testing, along with the feedback and paperwork that entails.

The purpose of this thesis was to ask and answer the question of why elementary school teachers choose to continue teaching under those circumstances. To that end I interviewed 12 teachers at Hilltop elementary in order to find out. My findings indicated that the teachers were distressed but enjoyed their job immensely. In order to explain this I enlisted the help of policy alienation theory as it was presented by Bekkers, Steijin and Tummers (2009), which I used to describe how public school teachers could be alienated by something other than the workplace itself. Furthermore I found that the teachers considered the workplace and the work itself to be both enjoyable and intrinsically meaningful. To explain this I adopted a theory of meaningful work presented by Chalofsky (2003)

In this Thesis I have found evidence that teachers are experiencing policy alienation as described by Bekkers, Steijin and Tummers (2009). Teachers expressed powerlessness to shape the decisions that they felt the state government were making without knowing what it's like to be a teacher. Further they felt that much of the additional paperwork, testing and assessing was unnecessary and in many cases meaningless. On top of this they seemed conflicted on a number of issues. Their professional standards and the wants and needs that they perceive their students and by extension their parents to have, are in conflict with the policy and organization decisions that are being made. As such the teachers are experiencing alienation, which is causing them stress, but this alienation stems from policy and less so from their workplace. Furthermore I've found support for meaningful work theory as well. Many of the teachers I interviewed found teaching to be their calling, some since childhood, others found it later in life, while others enjoyed it because it fit well into their life and their person. So we can say that the teachers have a good sense of self. The teachers also almost

unanimously named the children they work with as being the reason they come to work in the morning, furthermore they also seem to enjoy the challenge and variety teaching provides, indicating that many teachers derive meaning from their workplace as well. However I also found indications that the teachers had a poor balance between their work lives and their personal lives during the school year, even though many enjoyed the extra vacation they have during summer and Christmas. As such the teachers balance appears to be off.

Finally I presented a couple of further problem, that indicate that if things continue as they are or get worse than the work of teaching may begin to lose value for the teachers doing the work. And the danger that otherwise good teachers may lose interest in teaching, prompting younger teachers to find a different career, or leave the state as many have already done, and prompting older teachers to retire early.

Conclusion and final notes

With the evidence presented in this thesis I am willing to draw the conclusion that yes, The teachers at Hilltop elementary are experiencing policy alienation and it is indeed causing them stress. Along side that the reason the teachers I interviewed have continued to work so far is that they derive intrinsic meaning from working as a teacher. This motivation stems from their self identification as a teacher and they find the work and workplace to be of value as well. While many of the teachers I interviewed also saw it as a selfless endeavor, they were doing it for the sake of the children, this selfless endeavor is yet another source of meaning for the teachers. However that meaning is at risk. If teachers are further hindered from deriving meaning from their work then they could view it over time as meaningless. Whether or not policy alienation can transition to workplace alienation in such a way is not something I can fully prove in this thesis, however I am opening for the possibility.

On another Note it seems as though more changes are on there way for the teachers of North Carolina. According to more recent news articles it would seem conservatives in North Carolina are pushing to replace the common core. A move that would cause further policy changes for the teachers to tackle. (Wral.com 2014, Newsobserver.com 2014) From this thesis I have noted that teachers seem particularly distraught by higher ups making decisions without teachers being involved in the process. Depending on how implementation of new state standards for education are implemented it could constitute a further blow against

teachers motivations for teaching. Further draining their job of meaning.

Cox and Woods (1980) who's article I mentioned earlier in this thesis, and who's findings I hoped to expand on, did however seem to be spot on in his conclusion, that alienation amongst teachers would be on the rise, and that those in power would have trouble relinquishing it to teachers. (Cox and Woods 1980: 6) That seems to be the case again. Teachers are being pushed over the edge once again. And the education boards and the government seem once again unwilling to relinquish or delegate control to teachers. If further alienation of teachers is to be prevented then teachers must be given more of a voice in how teaching is done in their state, or at the very least be given more free room to decide how they teach in their own school. Until then there is a persistent risk of meaning being drained from the teachers like those at Hilltop elementary.

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Alle kilder som er brukt i denne oppgaven er oppgitt.

End Note

This Thesis contains **45 Pages**, Excluding Cover pages, reference list and attachments

This Thesis contains **16242 words**

Attachments: 7 pages

Participant request for Research project

“Why do Teachers teach? A study of elementary school teachers in North Carolina”

Background and purpose

In the midst of the economic crisis, the state of North Carolina has repeatedly frozen the wages of teachers in the state. Now, more proactively the state has cut tenure, as well as benefits for teachers with master degrees. However many teachers still chose to teach, and many still chose to become teachers.

The purpose of this research project is to discuss what is unique about being a teacher, that inspires teachers to persevere and continue to teach, in spite of the financial setbacks. As well as explore the unique challenges posed to teachers in North Carolina and potentially the United States in general. With your school acting as an example.

You have been asked to participate in this project because you have worked as a teacher for 3 years or more, and therefore have experienced some of the setbacks that occurred during the economic crisis and can provide a unique insight into how these setbacks have effected your daily life as well as the lives in situations similar to your own.

What does participating in this project involve?

In order to uncover what is unique about teaching and being a teacher, that makes people chose to remain in that profession, I need to talk to teachers themselves. To that end I will be conducting a series of interviews. If you agree to participate, that will involve a half hour interview where I will ask questions about your history as a teacher, as well as your education prior to teaching. Further I will inquire into what the pros and cons of teaching are, and why you choose to teach. Finally I will have some closing questions about where you feel you would draw the line, before you would choose to leave teaching.

What happens to the information you give me?

All personal information you give me will be treated as confidential. Only myself and my project supervisor will have direct access to this information. My supervisor only has access in order to ensure that I am doing things correctly. All names, and directly or indirectly identifiable information will be changed or altered in the finished thesis as well as in all archived information. This will be done to ensure your anonymity and further to ensure that nothing you say over the course of the interview will be used against you. Under no circumstances will any information about you be given to anyone not involved in the project. Nor will anything you say be disclosed to any other participants.

You will not be directly identifiable in the finished thesis.

The project is set to end at the end of May of 2014, but might possibly be extended until June of the same year. If it is delayed further, you will be informed. After this point, all audio recordings, and codes used to identify participants will be destroyed. All e-mails sent and

received to and from participants will also be deleted from my e-mail. This is to ensure that they cannot be traced back to the participants of the project.

Participation in this project is strictly voluntary.

All participation in this project is strictly voluntary. You may opt out at any time, and you will not be required to state your reason for leaving.

In the event that you choose not to participate, all personal information already gathered will also be made anonymous. And like above, e-mail contact between us will be deleted, and your recorded interview will be deleted. No personal information about you will be disclosed to anyone not involved in the project, and the other participants will not be notified.

If you have any questions with regards to this study, you may contact me or my supervisor via e-mail or phone:

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The study has been submitted for scrutiny to Norways personal rights comity (Personvernombudet) and the Norwegian Social science data service (Norges Samfunnsvitenskapelig Datatjeneste)

Agreement to participate in research project

This agreement implies that the participant has agreed to be interviewed for the purpose of this research project, and that adequate information about the project has been disclosed to the participant.

Participant may however retract their participation at any time up until the project is complete and published.

I have received adequate information about the project and agree to participate.

(Signed by participant, date signed)

Check off below if you agree to be interviewed.

I agree to be interviewed

Interview Guide

Introduction:

“In July, the North Carolina legislature passed a budget that ended teacher tenure, got rid of pay increases for teachers with master’s degrees, and froze teachers’ salaries for the fifth time in six years, even as their average pay was already \$10 000 dollars bellow the national average.” (Huffington post 2013)

In the midst of the economic crisis, the state of North Carolina has repeatedly frozen the wages of teachers in the state. While inflation steadily reduces the buying power of their wages. Now, more proactively the state has cut tenure, as well as benefits for teachers with a master degrees. With a situation such as this, it is meaningful to ask why this has gone on for so long. Shouldn't holding back wages for so long make teacher positions undesirable? Yet the fact that there are still enough teachers teaching classes and enough people seeking to become teachers that the state government sees no need to make the position more desirable, means that there must be more to it than that.

For this research project I would like to narrow my view a little bit. In this case there are at least two clear cut questions I could ask: Why do people still want to become teachers? Or: Why do teachers choose to continue to teach? In this case, I have chosen the later. In order to further refine my sample, I will only be interviewing teachers with 3 years or more of experience as a teacher. This should filter out many individuals who are using teaching as a stepping stone to another, better payed job. 3 years is also the measure used in the article mentioned at the beginning of this introduction, to discern between experienced and inexperienced teachers.

Research Question and Hypothesis:

Research Question:

In light of the economic strain placed on teachers in North Carolina, why do many chose to continue working as teachers in the state?

H1: Teachers chose to continue working as teachers, due to a strong commitment to childrens education.

H2: Teachers chose to continue to work as teachers, because the labor market is strained due to the economic crisis. (They can't find a better job)

H3: Teachers chose to continue working as teachers because teaching is self rewarding. (They love their job)

Interview guide:

Starting introduction:

(Will write this later)

Warm up questions:

- What in your past made you want to become a Teacher?
 - What sort of education did you get before becoming a teacher?

Main questions:

- How would you describe an average day in your life as a teacher?
 - What do you like about teaching?
 - What do you dislike about teaching?
 - Is there anything you would like to change?
- (- What is the most important part of being a teacher for you?)
- Over the past 6 years, in the midst of an economic crisis, teachers wages in North Carolina have been frozen 5 times, and recently tenure for teachers was removed, as were benefits to teachers holding a masters degree, as well as cuts to assistant hours.
- How do you feel about these decisions by the State government?
 - Why do you feel these decisions were made?
- How would you say this has affected your day to day experience of being a teacher?
 - Do you feel like you can do your job as a teacher satisfactorily with the resources at your disposal?
 - Have the cuts to assistant hours affected you as well?
- How would you say your personal life has changed?
 - Financial issues?

Closing questions:

- Have you ever considered a different career?
 - Under what circumstances would you want to change careers?
- Do you have anything else you would like to add?

Demographic questions:

- How old are you?
- How long have you been teaching?
 - Which grade do you teach?
- Are you married?
 - Do you have any children?
- About how much would you say you make per year?